

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION
RECREATION ISSUES WORKSHOP, Monday, June 16, 2008
5:00-8:00 P.M., Lower West Coast Service Center
2301 McGregor Boulevard, Ft. Myers, FL**

MEETING SUMMARY

This is a summary of the WRAC Recreation Issues Workshop on June 16, 2008, at the SFWMD Lower West Coast Service Center in Ft. Myers, FL. This report will be posted on <http://my.sfwmd.gov/wrac>.

Action: The Recreation Issues Workshop, without objection, recommended that the WRAC endorse a statement for inclusion in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan “Master Recreation Plan” that:

“On lands where Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) access was a traditional and legal use, and not in conflict with hydrological and ecological restoration goals, such ORV access should be considered a managed, future use in the Master Recreation Plan.”

Future Presentations/Meetings Requested:

- **Mobility Impaired/Disabled/Handicapped Access – FWCC**
- **Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Recreation Access: Areas of Agreement and Disagreement (move next meeting to River Ranch).**

Introduction: David Lithgow, Chair, WRAC Recreation Issues, welcomed everyone, stated the purpose of the meeting, the function of the WRAC and WRAC Issues Workshops, and asked people to introduce themselves.

Item 1: Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Recreation Development Update

- **Review of Facilitated Workshops (Coughlin) – Discussion:**
 - Disagreement about “items of agreement”. Items pulled from reports were items with more than 50% agreement.
 - Staff will again review facilitated meeting results reports and reiterate lists of “items agreed upon” and items not agreed upon.
 - Need to post that information to the website.
 - Request made to move October meeting to River Ranch to review this item.
 - Question about whether area would be closed to all other uses during hunting days? Comment that area should be open to all recreation uses during hunting days and managed more like the Kissimmee “PUA” (Public Use Area) rather than a Class I Wildlife Management Area.
 - Questions/comments about fairness of representation at facilitated work group meetings, and about deer hunting on the west shore.

- Problems with the “Straw man” proposal and outcomes of the facilitated meetings.
- Timeline for developing a proposal for expanded hunting opportunities was discussed. Goal is to complete discussions by the October meeting.

Item 2: Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) Land Management Overview (Goodwin): Discussion:

- Update provided on constructing a new public access and parking area at Bird rookery Swamp on CREW to accommodate recreational use. SFWMD having problems with County permits. Had hoped for fall '08 – looks like it will take longer now.
- Comments about Off-Road-Vehicle (ORV) access. At present, only 30 quota hunt permits are available on CREW each year and that is the only ORV access provided. Need more access, especially for traditional users and mobility impaired, disabled and handicapped people.
- SFWMD: ORV use at CREW was to accommodate hunting access during established hunting seasons as the area is very wet. The intent of the existing rules is not to provide ORV riding. Increased ORV use could not be supported with the existing trail system.
- Participant comment: It's a traditional use there and the traditional users take better care than the mudders and 4-wheelers. Not talking about that kind of use – talking about family camping with access to ORVs/Buggies.
- Chair: It is a tough issue. If everyone were as responsible as folks in attendance, might be open to more access. But “mudders” can mess it up for everyone.
- Participant: Hard time accepting that lack of management is sufficient reason to keep area closed to traditional ORV access. Could you not allow a few weekends/year? What about using existing fire lanes?
- Need more areas open to reasonable, managed ORV use, e.g. Flint Pen Strand, which has many buggy trails. Do not mean dirt bikes, r-wheelers, mudders or “fly-by-nighters”. Use same restrictions as in hunting season.
- Chair: Have discussed permits, providing gate lock combinations to permit holders, etc. Allowing only one day for scouting is too restrictive – trying to get FWCC to change that rule. Need to get rule proposals to FWCC every other year because they evaluate their rules on that schedule. Watch the FWCC website. We submitted a rule change for CREW.
- Comment that there is a difference between “mobility impaired” and “disabled”. Need to expand access for disabled but not necessarily “mobility impaired”. SFWMD: working on better access for disabled at Starvation Slough by allowing vehicular access for disabled to campground.

- There are not many designated areas for the disabled. On issue of scouting: some areas (Dinner Island; Fisheating Creek) allow scouting for two weeks. Other areas prohibit vehicles from 5:30 – 10:00 a.m.. Okaloacoochee Slough an example where roads are not shown in SFWMD pamphlet. Need to show roads on maps in the info SFWMD distributes.

Item 3: SFWMD Div. of Land Stewardship Update (Cotter and Kattel) - Discussion:

- Lake Kissimmee Boat Ramp (Shady Oaks) Update (Cotter):
 - SFWMD: At 90% design now, will be at 100% design in July. Working through FDEP questions on permit.
 - Bird Rookery Swamp: Dealing with County permitting. Need support from recreational user community that project is a good project in the public interest.
 - Comments about airboat ramps – asked and answered.
 - Comments about campgrounds – asked and answered. SFWMD will build campsite footprints to limits of budgeted FY 2009 funding; and, Polk County will operate and maintain the campgrounds and build the amenities.
 - Shelters and road crossings on Kissimmee Chain of Lakes – SFWMD budget has been reduced for FY 2009. Proposed FY 2009 includes funding for one shelter and one crossing.
 - Comment that a plan to divert some flow from Catfish Creek to the Machata property to store more water is a good plan because the dike is already in place. Avatar proposed plan to build a ditch/canal to provide boating access to North Lake Hatchineha is not a good plan. The Nature Conservancy opposes it. Hope SFWMD does as well.
 - **Public Comment:** Christian Muldevang: Scrub Biologist with long history in Big Cypress and Everglades. Need to preserve traditional recreational access to the back country and preserve the traditional cultures in the Everglades/Big Cypress ecosystems, but unrestricted use can cause severe damage. On the other hand, have video proof that Florida panthers can coexist with swamp buggies.
 - Comment that FWCC, at a recent meeting, adopted a resolution regarding ORV issues.
- Chandler Slough, Lake Istokpoga Boat Ramp and Vacant Lands (Kattel):
 - Parking, access and signage issues discussed.
 - Need to post hunting dates at kiosks and make sure trailheads for Florida Trail are visible and well marked.
 - Istokpoga Boat Ramp should be completed this year. Lease is for 25-30 years (to Highlands County). Questions about whether the county can charge user fees and if the county will take over operation and maintenance. SFWMD: Not anticipated that they would charge fees. Will manager live on site? No facilities there; SFWMD not acquiring any structures so don't know what county will do. Primitive camp site?.

- SFWMD: Primitive camping may be feasible on SFWMD lands adjacent to the Boat Ramp area.
- Chair: Replacement of RV camping at S-65C? SFWMD: Plan to relocate those sites to another location.
- Small game hunting at C-23/C-24 and Rocky Glades was approved by Governing Board on June 12.
- STA-5: Everglades Audubon representative reported as of last Saturday (June 7) some 160 species of birds have been documented, including an American Flamingo. About 734 people have toured the site from October 2007 to April 2008. Tours are conducted by Everglades and Tropical Audubon. Often accompanied by waterfowl hunters who help identify duck species while they are scouting the area.
- July 16, SFWMD will open the STA-1, West Public Access Site.

Item 4: Recreation Planning Update (Krenz) – Discussion:

- Chair: Status of comments on the CERP Master Recreation Plan (MRP) and how the MRP will be used in planning of CERP projects? SFWMD: Each CERP project is required to address recreation. The MRP will be used as guidance for CERP Project Delivery Teams as Project Implementation Reports are completed. The MRP will be a source of information about appropriate activities and facilities for project sites.
- Chair: Informed participants that although the public comment period for the MRP has closed, issues not previously captured can be raised by the group, recommended to WRAC and included in SFWMD agency comments on the MRP.
- Comment, questions and discussion about whether Picayune Strand CERP project will be included under authority of the MRP. SFWMD: It is different because \$30 million in federal funds were used to help acquire the land. US Fish and Wildlife Service has review authority over Florida Div. of Forestry's management plan for the area. There are issues regarding access and use of the area.
- Comments that Picayune Strand Recreation Advisory group had proposed limited and managed ORV trails and a rifle range. Have been rejected as incompatible with restoration. Sportsmen being closed out of too many areas and the decision-making. Chair: Does Div. of Land Stewardship have any influence? Will check. SFWMD will look at reasonable uses.
- Participant comment that at CERP Picayune Strand Planning meeting, ORV access and use was most requested activity by public, but a paper handed out at that meeting said ORV use at Picayune would not be considered by SFWMD. Agencies tossing ball back and forth. Agree ORVs should not be running up and down levees or destroying areas like Bad Luck Prairie, but that is what ORV management plans are for. Got similar reaction on proposal for more ORV use at CREW.
- Byron Maharrey, President, Everglades Coordinating Council, read a statement into the record as comments on the MRP.

- Chair: Proposed action statement (see “Action”, above) as amended. Adopted without objection by participants.
- Questions and discussion regarding hunter access through public access area at STA1-West and recreation access facility planning at expedited project sties (Levee 6, East, Compartments B and C, etc.

Future Meetings:

- **August 11, 2008: SFWMD, Building B-1 Auditorium**
- **October 13, 2008: Ft. Lauderdale, FL, place to be announced, 5-8 p.m. (will look into moving meeting to Osceola County).**
- **December 15, 2008, Building B-1 Auditorium, West Palm Beach, FL, 5-8:00 p.m.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.